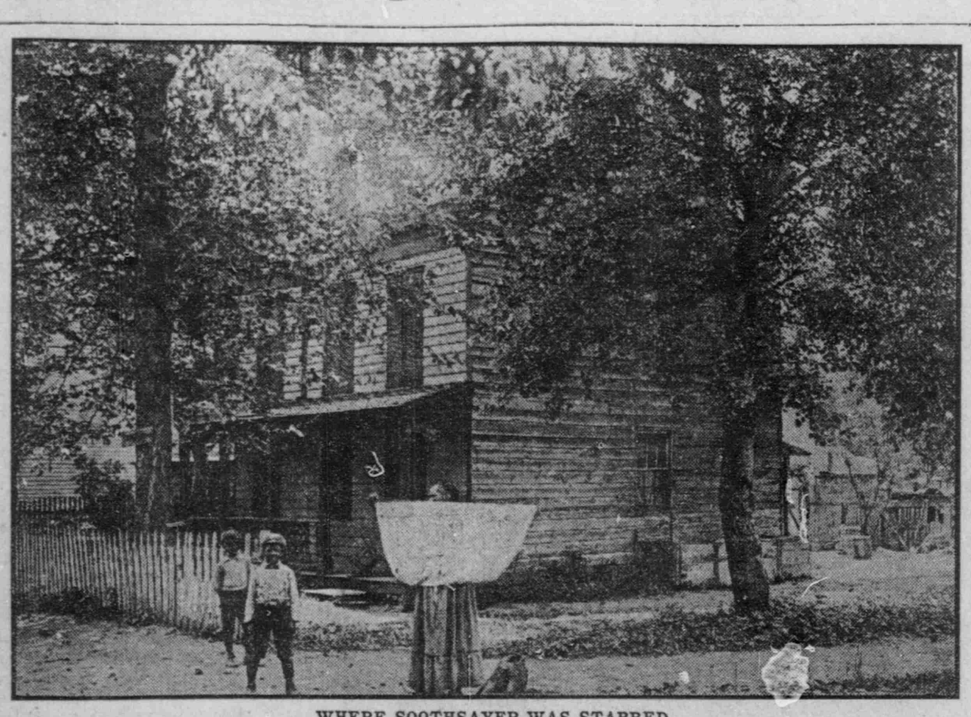
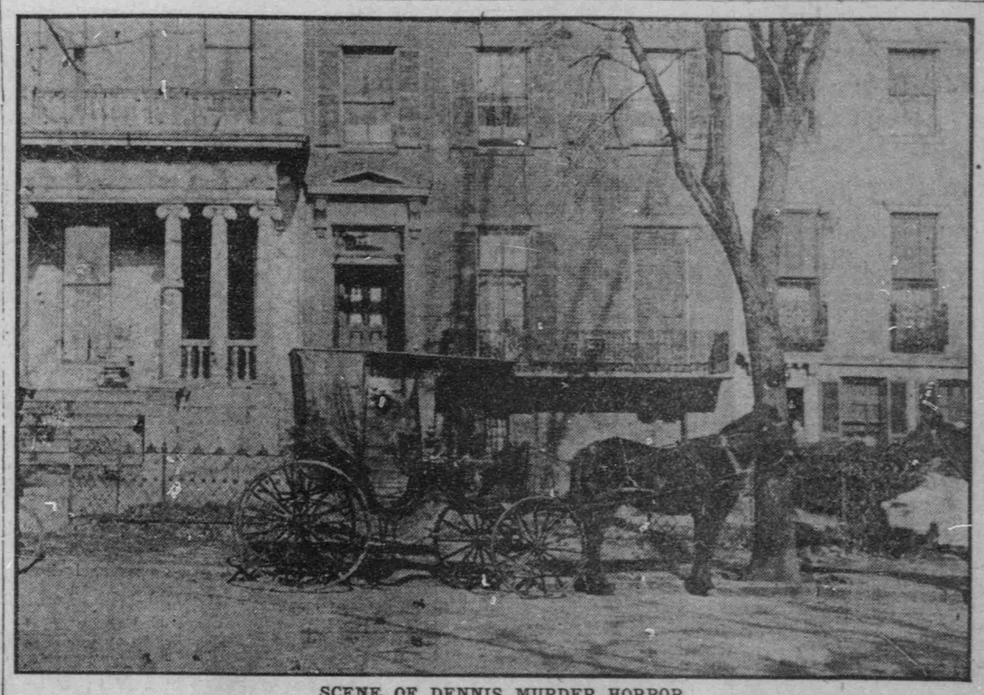
WASHINGTON MYSTERIES THAT REMAIN UNSOLVED



WHERE SOOTHSAYER WAS STABBED.
In this cottage at Anacostia lived and died the notorious Kate Jordon, dealer in love potions and reader of stars.

VICTIM OF THE TRAGEDY.
Unhappy woman who was stricken while asleep.



SCENE OF DENNIS MURDER HORROR.
Through the unshuttered window of the center house in the picture the murderer effected his entrance.

Strange Crimes of Nation's Capital That Remain Plunged in Deepest Obscurity After the Lapse of Years.

HIDDEN in an obscurity that in all human probability will never be pierced and that the succeeding years serve but to increase lie the motives that led to some of the most grucsome tragedies of modern life in Washington. A body, lying stark and bloody; a weapon, steeped in the mystery of crime; a disordered room; the evidences of a hurried flight—these tell all that is known.

To the solution of these problems in crime the energy and brains of the Washington detective force, one of the most competent in the country, have been directed, but without avail; the mysteries of those earlier days are mysteries still. The dark veil has never been lifted.

Somewhere in the country or the world the criminals who are responsible for these tragedies drag out what must be a ghastly and miserable existence. The motive that inspired and nerved their arms when the fatal blows were dealt may suffice to save some of them from the burden that oppresses them, but for the larger number no merciful thought of this character can effect an entrance into their minds. They must bear their cross alone. Remorse and despair and the memory of the dreadful night when their victim fell can never leave them.

Of tragedies of this character there have been in recent years relatively few in Washington—three or four, perhaps, since Major Richard Sylvester became Superintendent of Police. Before that time there were many—some of which tradition has so shrouded in romance it is difficult to extricate facts from the enveloping fiction. Theories without number have been offered to explain them—some plausible and possible, some without further or other recommendation than the ingenuity of their construction—but all have failed to explain. The mysteries remain unsolved.

The Old Days of Romance.

Back in Washington's earlier history occurrences of this mysterious character were sufficiently frequent. Those were the days of romance, and romance and mystery were ever twin sisters and good friends. In the prosaic present, when policemen and detectives have abandoned disguises and descended to more matter of fact methods of unraveling the mysterious and apprehending criminals, better work is accomplished. There is far less of the spectacular, but much more of real effectiveness.

Crime, in deplorable fact, has lost much of the atmosphere that formerly enveloped it. Villains of today are by no means the melancholy, ill-used and Bryonesque creations of long ago. They are for the most part rather jovial ruffians, without even the feeble grace of good looks to recommend them and with no skeleton in the family closet at all adequate as explanation or excuse of the brutal meanness of their crimes. A sordid motive usually inspires their actions—that animus of the ne'er-do-well, that the world owes him a living and that if he has to collect it by force it is just that much worse for the world.

Not in every case, however, has this been true. "Age cannot wither nor custom stale" the infinite variety of human attributes. Love and hate and revenge play their parts on the stage of the present, just as they did when the world was young and as they will be doing when the heavens are preparing to roll up like a scroll. The costumes of the actors, and the settings of the stage are different—that is all; the old motives and the old plots are still in evidence.

Officer's Ghastly Find.

On September 25, 1900, Policeman Potter of the Third precinct, patrolling his beat on N Street northwest, was halted by a letter carrier, who informed the officer that for a week he had been unable to secure an entrance to the house at 2141, occupied by Miss Sallie E. Clayville. He had carried letters to the door and rung the bell, but there had been no response, and the afternoon papers of the past week littered the vestibule.

Policeman Potter reported the facts to his immediate superior, Sergeant Judge, and under the latter's instructions the door was broken down, the house entered, and the dead and decomposed body of Miss Clayville found stretched upon a lounge in one of the parlors on the first floor. A great blood stain extended from the body out into the center of the floor, the room was in frightful disorder, furniture had been overturned, and all about were evidences of a struggle. Death, it was very evident, had occurred some days before the body was found.

When Policeman Potter entered the house it was through a back basement door. Stumbling up a dark flight of steps that led from the basement to the first floor he tripped and nearly fell over a great piece of tapestry, that apparently had been hurled down the stairway. He reached the first floor and groped his way through the pantry to the back parlor.

Through the obscurity he could make out dimly the outline of the form of a woman, lying across a lounge that had been dragged to the center of the room. It was Miss Clayville.

The Room in Disarray.

The handsomely furnished room was in strange disarray. Three upturned chairs sprawled upon the floor; crumpled newspapers were flung carelessly about in the two connecting rooms. One of these bore the date of September 18, showing that on that day some person, whether Miss Clayville or another, had been alive in the house. Blood stained the floor and splashes of blood were found in a basin that stood beside the couch.

These were the essential, physical facts, and for a week Washington opinion wavered among three conflicting theories—murder, suicide, and natural death. The fact that all the doors and windows on the basement and first floors were securely locked or fastened perhaps would exclude from participation in the crime—if one were committed—of any person who had not a key, though it is possible that an exit might have been effected from the open windows on the second story.

The woman's body was so badly decomposed that Deputy Coroner Glazebrook, who performed the autopsy, found it practically impossible to make an effective and decisive examination of the surface; he was able to discover no marks of violence. He examined the contents of the stomach, but admitted that had any poison other than arsenic been used the chemical tests made would not have indicated its presence. On the other hand the condition in which the room was found was strongly indicative of a struggle between Miss Clayville and some unknown assailant, or else of her own struggles when she felt the pangs and terrors of approaching death.

Yet, if the latter hypothesis were the correct one, why should she have brought the heavy basin from her sleeping apartment on the second floor to the parlor? If she fell across the couch in her last agony, as this theory necessarily involves, how was it that she managed to cover herself with the rug that enveloped her body when it was found?

Facts Increased Mystery.

There were other circumstances—some in the life of Miss Clayville—that added to and intensified the mystery. Born in Chincoteague Island, Va., she had come to Washington less than a decade before her death, a beautiful and attractive young woman of twenty-three. Before that time she had lived in Philadelphia, where she had relatives of means and some prominence. For some years she had lived in the N Street residence, which had been attractively furnished, letting some of her unoccupied rooms to well-known Washington people. A naval officer and his wife, a lawyer and his wife and child, with the latter's governess, had been among the lodgers. The naval officer, however, had been ordered to Paris, and one by one all the lodgers had left.

Miss Clayville became gloomy and very despondent. She became involved in financial difficulties and the house, which she had bought with a mortgage attachment, was sold over her head, the mortgage being foreclosed. Since March before her death she had been living alone, with occasional visits from "Annie," the governess of the lawyer's child. "Annie," whose name was never further disclosed, seemed to have been Miss Clayville's only companion.

But not altogether, either. James R. McClellan, a grocer at the corner of Twenty-first and N Streets northwest, had called at Miss Clayville's residence on September 20, five days before the finding of the body, and a large woman he did not know then answered his ring at the bell. At that time Miss Clayville, as the condition of her body abundantly showed, was dead or else died that day.

The identity of this "large woman," who on the only occasion when she appeared on the scene told Grocer McClellan that Miss Clayville was too ill to be seen, remains a mystery to this day. Why and whither she disappeared nobody knows. Why she failed to call for professional or other assistance is also unexplained. If she were found, probably she could throw light upon the mystery that enshrouds Miss Clayville's death.

Murder of Mrs. Dennis.

The foul murder of Mrs. Ada Gilbert Dennis, one of the most brutal, bestial, and cowardly that disgrace the criminal annals of the city, is another Washington tragedy that remains unsolved. Suspicion has been directed hither and yon, theories without number have been offered and discarded, but the mystery remains.

It was on the morning of December 10, 1901, that Washington awoke to the knowledge of the perpetration of this atrocious crime. Through the medium of The Times the story was early on the streets and the house at 1117 K Street northwest became the mecca of a curious crowd, absorbed in morbid interest. The woman was not dead, but she lay unconscious, beaten almost beyond recognition and at death's very portal.

Mrs. Dennis was a dressmaker, one of the most fashionable in Washington, who enjoyed an extensive patronage from Washington's inner circle. She had been a woman of considerable beauty, of which she retained decided traces. She attended well to her business, which was prospering largely, and so far as anyone knew was without an enemy in the world.

At 5 o'clock on the fateful morning Miss Mary Doyle, who occupied a second-story apartment in the Dennis residence, heard groans and moans coming up the radiator. She listened and after a time distinguished the voice of Mrs. Dennis.

"Mary," said the voice, faintly and brokenly; "Mary, come to me."

Miss Doyle made her way to the door of Mrs. Dennis' room, the rear room on the first floor. The door was locked, as was that of the front room; from inside came the groans and pitiful little sobbing cries that had first attracted Miss Doyle's attention. With the assistance of Smith Winchell, a carpenter, the door was broken in and a ghastly sight revealed.

Murderer's Brutal Work.

Mrs. Dennis lay on her side in bed, where evidently she had been attacked while she slept. She was bathed in blood. The assault had been committed with some blunt instrument and the woman's features were battered beyond recognition. One ear had been almost torn from her head.

There were no signs of a struggle, and it is very probable Mrs. Dennis was not aware of the presence of the murderer until after the first blow at least had been inflicted. An open window at the front of the house indicated the probable direction of the murderer's escape.

Mrs. Dennis was removed to the Garfield Hospital, where she lingered for many weeks, dying without ever having regained consciousness. Before her removal to the hospital she had said, in answer to a question, that she knew her assailant, but whether from weakness or unwillingness she never disclosed it. If at any time she was mentally capable of revealing the secret, she sealed her lips resolutely and carried it to her grave.

The top of the piano stool in the front room had been unscrewed, and it was surmised it was this impromptu weapon with which the death blows had been inflicted. This was a surmise merely, however, and the facts never served to establish its correctness beyond dispute. It may have been the murderer took this method of disarming suspicion and that he carried the actual weapon away with him in his flight.

Theft Not the Motive.

That theft was not the animating motive of the crime was abundantly evident. Some hundreds of dollars in money was in the room at the time, but this was not disturbed, and no search for it had been made. There had been no attempt to rifle the drawers of the tables and other furniture, and everything indicated the prompt disappearance of the midnight assailant as soon as his purpose was accomplished. That purpose was murder.

During the long weeks that Mrs. Dennis lingered at the point of death the local detective department made every possible effort to ascertain the motive for the crime and to discover and arrest the murderer. The newspapers carried the usual daily announcements that "important clues had been discovered and arrests were likely to be made at any moment." They never were, though.

Major Sylvester has his own theory of the criminal and the motive and manner of the crime, but this he refuses either to reveal or discuss. When the subject is broached the major retires into his shell and refuses to have anything to say. His opinion is almost as mysterious as the crime itself.

Countless efforts have been made to evolve from the evidence at hand the facts of the case. They have all failed. What dark secrets might have been brought to light had anyone ever been able to catch the thread of truth that must lead to the solution of the mystery no one can say. Only when such somber tragedies are being discussed does the Dennis case, that for a month held the attention of a continent, receive the tribute of even a passing thought. Then it is mentioned—and forgotten.

The Soothsayer's Death.

On Christmas Eve, 1902, Kate Jordon, prophetess and soothsayer, stumbled out of the old house in Anacostia, in which she made her home, and clutched frantically at the gate posts.

"I'm stabbed," she almost screamed, and sank to the ground.

At the same time three children, playing in the vicinity, saw a negro man running hurriedly away from the house and in the direction of the Anacostia Bridge. Running rapidly, the man vanished in the distance, and from that moment to this no trace of the murderer has ever been found.

For the woman was dying. Attracted by her frantic appeals for help, her neighbors rushed to her assistance, and she was carried back into the house. She expired in a few moments, without ever having regained sufficient consciousness to give the name of her assailant, to describe him, or to give any account of the manner in which she had been assailed and stabbed.

In Kate Jordon's breast a gaping wound, from which the blood had ebbed until it stained her garments red, explained the cause and manner of her death. A great dirk, still stained with the woman's blood, was found just within the doorway of the house, where it had been thrown apparently by the murderer in his flight.

An immediate investigation of the tragedy was made by the local police and detective departments, large forces of men being kept on the case for several weeks. Several arrests were made, notably that of George Brown, who was known as "the lieutenant," and had been the active agent of the fortune teller in bringing business to her establishment. In a way he answered the meager description of the murderer that had been furnished by the children who witnessed the escape from the scene of the crime, but nothing else ever developed to connect him in any way with its commission. After a few days' detention he was released.

Expert in Love Affairs.

The woman had plied her trade at Anacostia for many years and acquired a considerable competency. She charged well for her services—when she thought her clients could afford to pay—and, if rumor for once speak truth, was not hampered by any unwillingness to face difficulties. She read the future with unerring certainty, indicated beyond question the foreordained fate of anyone who applied for the information, poured oil upon the troubled waters of love, and managed to a very large extent the affairs of her ignorant neighbors.

But not all of those who came to the little house in Anacostia were of the ignorant neighborhood type. There were many from the city, drawn by the fame and reputation of the prophetess, who sought her advice, the never-ending credulity of human nature furnishing either reason or excuse.

There can be little doubt that Kate Jordon's efforts to read the future or to interfere in love affairs or marital infelicities or disagreements cost her her life. Whether it be assumed she was slain by a man whose own home her machinations had wrecked or whose hopes she had encouraged only to blight, or whether the actual murderer was the blind emissary of some superior intelligence, the correctness of basic hypothesis can scarcely be questioned. She wrought her own fate.

Probably the murderer gained admission to the house on the pretext that he sought the fortune teller's professional services and she was perhaps outlining his future when he inflicted the fatal thrust. However it was, the murderer remains unknown, nor is there reasonable chance the mystery will be solved until, from some criminal's death bed, from which he seeks to banish the dread specter of remorse, comes the grim story of the crime.

Russian Emigrant Killed.

The death of the Anacostia prophetess was followed in less than a week by the murder of Lazier Gozman, a Russian, who had been only a year in the country and conducted a little shop at 619 Gordon Avenue northeast. The man was found on the floor of his shop, quite dead, with fifteen hatchet wounds on his head and face. His accumulated savings, amounting to about $20 in money, had been stolen.

The apparent motive in this case was obvious, but the detection of the murderer proved to be another matter. If he had come to the store to rob its owner, a frenzy of desperation swayed him, and he attacked Gozman with the first weapon that came to hand. Maddened by the lust of blood, the murderer struck again and again, until his victim's head was cut and chopped almost into pieces.

The murder was committed in broad daylight, during the afternoon of December 30. Gozman was seen alive by some of his neighbors at 2 o'clock, and his dead body was discovered at 5:30. His nephew, Frank Frager, went to the little store to see its owner, and, finding the door locked and bolted on the inside, and repeated knocks failing to produce any response, broke the door down.

Gozman's body was stretched in the doorway, between the store and the rear room in which the man lived and slept. Blood was all about. Near his lifeless hand was a cleaver, which he had snatched up evidently in an effort to defend himself, but which he had never had an opportunity to use.

Gozman once dead, the murderer had lost no time in rifling the till, and the dead man's pockets, of all they contained. He had locked and bolted the door from the inside, so that he would not be disturbed, and then, his fell mission ended, had made his escape by the back way into an alley.

Suspect Given Liberty.

A negro who had been seen hovering around the neighborhood and whose hands bore certain small wounds, was arrested on suspicion, and was even indicted by the grand jury, but the evidence at hand did not satisfy the district attorney that a conviction could be secured, and the indictment was nolprossed.

It may have been that a deeper motive than that of theft had inspired the crime. Gozman was from Russia, a land of intrigue, plot and counterplot. What his life had been in that country was not revealed, and certainly the theory that he had been connected with some of the many secret societies that exist under the ban of the Czar is neither unreasonable nor unlikely. Stranger things have happened. Members of such societies who have incurred the ill-will of their associates have been followed across continents and oceans, until a ghastly vengeance was wreaked upon them.

The theft may have been only a blind to conceal the real motive. So far as is known Gozman was a quiet, harmless person, who in Washington had incurred no man's enmity. The little shop he kept could have been stocked anew for $20; there was little to excite cupidity or to indicate the possession of wealth. It seems scarcely reasonable to believe the few paltry dollars he had saved nerved the arm that sought and took his life. It is harder to conceive that one so ignorant and bestial should have been able so to cover his tracks that the best efforts of the detective force failed absolutely to reveal or even indicate his identity.

The amateur detective may find in this broad field full swing for his talent. Should he be of an analytical mind and possess half the shrewdness of Conan Doyle's famous character, he may be able to succeed in unraveling these mysteries, where so many others have failed—may suggest a theory that will prove to be correct.

Should he do so, he will have something more than the consciousness of successful mental effort to reward his industry and perseverance; he will have furnished the clue which shall lead to the apprehension of the criminal and his arrest and eventual punishment; he will have contributed largely and effectively to the security of society and the sanctity of human life. The amateur detective may think well of himself if any one of these mysteries succumbs to his talents.

One would have to be an optimist of the most confirmed character to regard such an outcome as even reasonably likely. The time to fix responsibility for a crime is at the time of its occurrence, when surrounding incidents and circumstances are fresh in the memories of those who have witnessed them or been actors in them. In isolated cases years have passed before the truth has become known, and the criminal brought to bar, but this has been rare.

Far more likely that these Washington mysteries will remain mysteries until the end of time.

The Quarter-Century Anniversary of Long-Distance Telephone Talk

IT is a quarter of a century since the beginning of long distance telephony.

Before 1879, no telephone message had been transmitted from one city to another, and the idea that the sound of the human voice could be carried over a wire forty or fifty miles in length was not generally entertained. It was, however, firmly fixed in the minds of the men who had recently formed the Bell Company, and they even then predicted that the time would come when the country would be covered by a harmonious network of telephone wires, and the distance over which conversation could be carried on would be measured by hundreds and thousands of miles, bringing the entire population in communication through a single universal system.

Three years after the invention of Alexander Graham Bell had been exhibited at the Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia and had excited the curiosity of the world, rather as a scientific novelty than a practical utility, these men in the New England company authorized the construction of a line from Boston to Lowell, a distance of twenty-seven miles. When the wire had been strung it was found that they were right in their expectations, and the voice of a person speaking in Boston could be heard by the person at the receiver in Lowell.

Even then the public failed to grasp the significance of this achievement, and it was regarded largely as an experiment until a business transaction, involving several thousand dollars, was brought to a successful consummation by conferences over the line between the two Massachusetts cities. Papers were drawn at Boston, agreed to by those present, and then read to the parties in Lowell. Amendments were suggested and discussed, until the document was satisfactory to all the persons interested.

News Spread Far and Wide.

The news of this transaction spread far and wide and did much to awaken in the minds of business men a realization of the commercial possibilities of the telephone, while it served to stimulate the engineers and experts employed by the company in their endeavors to perfect the system. Although it was possible to use the Lowell line for business purposes, the apparatus was crude and imperfect in operation.

But the beginning had been made on that career of progress in long-distance telephony which is one of the marvels of the modern industrial world. From the first it was evident that some better conductor must be found than the iron wire then in use, and within six years from the date of the Lowell experiment a hard-drawn copper wire had been made and tested in actual operation, and the ability to converse over long distances, as the term is understood today, has been the result of the use of this medium.

The first experimental line in which copper wire was used was that from Boston to New York, completed in 1884, and this was in turn followed by extensions to Philadelphia and other points of commercial importance, so that the cities in the Eastern section of the country were linked together. Then the lines were pushed Westward, and on October 21, 1892, Prof. Bell, in the presence of a company of distinguished electricians and officers of telephone companies, spoke into a transmitter in the city of New York, and the message was heard in Chicago.

Less than three months later, on the 7th of the following February, Gov. William E. Russell of Massachusetts, surrounded by a group of men prominent in the affairs of the Bay State, opened the line from Boston to Chicago, and during the Columbian Exposition held in the Western city later in the year, there were many occurrences which brought home to the minds of the people the fact that what had been exhibited as a toy at the Centennial Exposition had become a factor of vast importance in the world of affairs.

How It Fits in Our Lives.

In what unexpected ways the long distance telephone fits into the occurrences of every day life was early illustrated by an incident in the visit of a distinguished educator to the fair. It was one of the first and most notable instances in which the telephone has been used to locate a man visiting a city far from his home.

An important matter at Harvard University required the action of President Eliot, then in Chicago. The residence at which he was a guest was called by telephone, only to learn that President Eliot had left for the fair a few minutes before the message was received, and was not expected to return until late in the evening. It was explained to the president's host that the question was one of emergency, and the Chicago man called upon the president of the telephone company for assistance.

The police department of the fair was at once communicated with by telephone, and by means of the same instrument a description of President Eliot was given to the guards at the entrance gates, with instructions that when he entered the grounds he was to be requested to go to the office of the chief of police. Consequently, much to the surprise of the head of the university, as he passed the turnstile, an officer approached him, and after asking his name told him that he was wanted at headquarters.

President Eliot was escorted to the presence of the chief, and then learned that he was desired at the telephone exhibit. On reaching that point the full nature of the errand was explained to him, and he was soon placed in telephone communication with Harvard university. What was done that day, probably for the first time, has now become of common occurrence, and it frequently happens that telephone messages are sent broadcast to locate some man who is traveling from place to place.

The early operation of the line to Chicago afforded a marked illustration of the happening of that which has previously been demonstrated to be an impossibility. A distinguished English electrician was among the visitors to exposition, and was given the courtesy of the line to Boston, in order that he might experience the unprecedented opportunity of speaking over such a great distance.

By one of the revenges of time, when this occurrence took place, the subject of the conversation was the sale of a book on electricity of which the visitor was the author, and in which he had conclusively proved that it would never be possible to speak a distance of over 600 miles by the telephone.

Such pessimistic prophecy is not without numerous precedents, as one electrician of great ability lent the weight of his authority to the statement that electricity for incandescent lighting could never be distributed from a single central station over an area of more than a quarter of a square mile. An earlier instance is that of the great English physicist who prophesied during the building of the first trans-Atlantic steamboat that it would be impossible for a steamer to carry sufficient coal to cross the Atlantic, and, as a matter of fact, this man himself came from England to America as one of the passengers on the first trip of the steamer.

However conjectural has been the feeling as to the possible patronage of the long distance lines when they were first projected, it was dispelled at once by the rapidity with which the public availed themselves of the opportunity of making a query and receiving an immediate relief over hundreds of miles of wire.

One Circuit of 2,000 Miles.

The long distance lines have grown apace, until, in this period of twenty-five years, the total amount of such wire in the Bell telephone system has reached to about 275,000 miles, which in turn connects to local lines of about 3,000,000 miles, all arranged in such a manner that through the various switchboards the circuit can be branched from point to point to reached the desired destination, the longest circuit ever made being that from Boston to Little Rock, about 1,950 miles. This was an emergency case, as a man wished to ask for information and receive a reply at once, relative to some fluctuations in the cotton market.

In the quarter century while this expansion has been taking place there have been numerous changes and improvements in the apparatus. The first purpose and conception of a telephone exchange was merely to afford communication between individuals in one village or town through a single switchboard, and it was a coincidence that the magnet switchboard in general use was easily adapted to provide connections to switchboards in other towns.